

Dragonshards

Strike Force: Dhakaan

By Keith Baker



The adventure is going well . . . too well. Clever tactics and a few lucky critical hits have demolished encounters that were supposed to be major challenges, and unless something happens the adventure will come to an early and unsatisfying end. Enter the strike force. Depending on the needs of the night, these characters can be deadly adversaries, invaluable allies, or a way to add color to a scene. This article examines the Heirs of Dhakaan -- the elite warriors of Darguun.

Structure and Tactics

The Heirs of Dhakaan are the scions of a martial tradition that once dominated Khorvaire. For thousands of years they have been in hiding. Now they have returned. Dhakaani troops are among the most dangerous soldiers in Khorvaire; they are skilled, disciplined, well-equipped, and utterly devoted to their clans. If the clans were to come together under one leader, they might threaten Khorvaire itself. But for now they remain divided, squabbling among themselves to determine the rightful heir of Dhakaan. Some clans are engaged in full-scale wars against their brethren. Others comb the continent for relics of the ancient empire, believing that the symbolic and magical power of these items are the key to victory.

The Dhakaani are far deadlier than their Ghaal'dar cousins, and they should prove an unpleasant surprise for a party used to savage or undisciplined humanoids. Dhakaani soldiers act with elegant precision, shifting targets or formations on a single word from their commanders. Dhakaani leaders are seasoned veterans who can analyze any situation and determine the most dangerous threats. They seek to incapacitate spellcasters as quickly as possible and combine attacks to eliminate foes.

The weaknesses of this Dhakaani force include poor Will saves and a complete lack of divine magic, due to the agnostic nature of Dhakaani culture. The dirge singer can heal, and a taarka'khes scout can attempt to use the Use Magic Device skill to trigger a *wand of cure light wounds*. But the lack of clerical support can prove a drawback against a well-balanced opponent or an undead foe.

Whenever possible, Dhakaani scout the terrain before battle, spreading missile support into key locations and letting snipers take advantage of Plunging Shot. Stealthy bugbears draw close to the enemy before raging into battle, followed by the hobgoblin troopers. While the bugbears are taught to hurl themselves into the foe, the troopers use Combat Expertise and Improved Trip to harangue enemies. The dirge singer uses *hold person* or *confusion* against enemy melee champions and tanglefoot bags against obvious spellcasters, while inspiring her troops with bardic music.

Between the poor Will saving throws of the melee troops and the potential of a *fireball* to devastate a group of soldiers, the rare wizards assigned to Dhakaani units generally take defensive roles: an evoker might start the battle with a *fireball*, but on subsequent rounds he'll hold his action for counterspelling until he's certain enemy spellcasters have been neutralized.



Dhakaani Encounters

You can add a Dhakaani strike force into an adventure in many ways. Consider the following possibilities.

- The party has been sent to plunder a Dhakaani ruin. When they arrive, a goblinoid troop is already camped around the entrance and exploring the dungeon.
- After the party emerges from a dungeon, they are challenged by a Dhakaani force: The leader demands that the adventurers hand over a Dhakaani relic they have stolen.
- A Dhakaani ruin turns out to be occupied by powerful aberrations . . . creatures far too powerful for the party to overcome alone. A Dhakaani force arrives on the scene, and together they could overcome the aberrations. Are they willing to share their loot, giving the Dhakaani the artifacts for which they have come?
- The party comes upon a battle between Dhakaani goblins and Valenar elves. Do they try to avoid it, or do they pick a side? There's no telling who's in the right, and either force could become a powerful enemy.
- The party walks into an inn -- and discovers a troop of Dhakaani soldiers in the common room. Are the goblinoids here for a sinister reason, or just looking for a hot meal and shelter from the rain? Can they pass the night without triggering an incident?
- A disguised Dhakaani dirge singer has worked her way into an academic institution and is using their resources to help her recover treasures of the empire. She could oppose the party, or she could employ them.
- After dealing with a group of adventurers and coming to respect their prowess, a Dhakaani clan could ask the adventurers to help them initiate diplomatic relations with one of the Five Nations or dragonmarked houses.

The Soldiers of Dhakaan

The composition of a Dhakaani unit varies based on the nature of the mission. Seven different characters are provided below, providing the basic tools for creating different units. A covert action team includes snipers and scouts led by a dirge singer, whereas a shock troop relies on bladebreakers, troopers, and an evoker.

Dirge Singer

The dirge singers are the spiritual leaders of the goblinoids, and they are also trained to serve as spies and diplomats. Dirge singers are almost always female.

Dirge Singer CR 8

Female hobgoblin bard 7

N Medium humanoid

Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +0, Spot +5

Languages Common, Elven, Goblin, Gnome, Orc

AC 17, touch 13, flat-footed 14

hp 29 (7 HD)

Fort +2, **Ref** +8, **Will** +7

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee dagger +4 (1d4-1/19-20) or

Ranged mwk shortbow +9 (1d6/x3)

Base Atk +5; **Grp** +4

Special Actions bardic music 7/day(*suggestion* [DC 18], inspire competence, inspire courage +2, *fascinate* 3 creatures, countersong)

Combat Gear 2 tanglefoot bags, *circle of sound* (ECS 271), *potion of invisibility*, *potion of protection from arrows* 10/magic, *wand of cure light wounds*

Bard Spells Known (CL 7th, 20% arcane spell failure chance):

3rd (1/day) -- *blink*, *confusion* (DC 18)

2nd (3/day) -- *cure moderate wounds*, *detect thoughts* (DC 16), *hold person* (DC 17), *mirror image*

1st (5/day) -- *charm person* (DC 16), *cure light wounds*, *disguise self*

0 (3/day) -- *daze* (DC 15), *detect magic*, *lullaby*, *mage hand*, *message*, *prestidigitation*

Abilities Str 8, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 11, Cha 18*

SQ bardic knowledge +11

Feats Iron Will, Song of the Heart[ECS], Spell Focus (enchantment)

Skills Bluff +12, Diplomacy +19, Disguise +9 (+9 with *disguise self*, +2 when acting), Gather Information +10, Knowledge (geography) +5, Knowledge (history) +7, Knowledge (local) +7, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +7, Hide +7, Intimidate +10, Move Silently +7, Perform (song) +13, Sense Motive +8, Spellcraft +5, Spot +5

Possessions combat gear plus masterwork chain shirt, dagger, potion bracer, *circle of sound*** (ECS 271), *cloak of Charisma* +2*. **If no one else in the unit has a *circle of sound*, replace this with a *ring of protection* +1.

Chain Master Champion

The flail and spiked chain are traditional weapons of the empire, and those who master these weapons earn respect in the eyes of their peers. This skilled soldier could serve as the leader of an elite squad of troopers or as the bodyguard of an important dirge singer.

Chain Master Champion CR 8

Male hobgoblin fighter 6/exotic weapon master 1

LN Medium humanoid

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +0, Spot +0

Languages Common, Elven, Goblin

AC 20, touch 11, flat-footed 19

hp 50 (7 HD)

Fort +8, **Ref** +3, **Will** +4

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares)

Melee +1 *spiked chain* +14/+9 (2d4+7) or

Melee +1 *spiked chain* +12/+12/+7 (2d4+7) with flurry of strikes or

Ranged composite longbow +8/+3 (1d8+4/x3)

Base Atk +7; **Grp** +11

Atk Options flurry of strikes, Power Attack

Combat Gear 2 *potions of cure light wounds* (both in backpack), 3 *potions of enlarge person* (1 in backpack), *potion of cure moderate wounds*, and *potion of protection from arrows* 10/magic

Abilities Str 18, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 8

Feats Combat Expertise[B], Darguun Mauler[RoE], Improved Trip, Iron Will, Power Attack[B], Weapon Focus (chain weapons), Weapon Specialization (chain weapons)

Skills Climb +3, Craft (armorsmith) +2, Craft (weaponsmith) +7, Heal +2, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (history) +2, Move Silently +0, Ride +4

Possessions +1 *full plate*, +1 *spiked chain*, mighty composite longbow (+4 damage), quiver of 20 arrows, potion bracer, *circle of sound* or a *ring of protection* +1 (depending on which better serves the needs of the mission)

Hobgoblin Heavy Infantry Trooper

Not all Dhakaani soldiers possess this level of skill, and most soldiers in a Dhakaani wouldn't have potions, but when the Clans send troops into the outer world they send their best.

Hobgoblin Heavy Infantry Trooper CR 5

Male hobgoblin fighter 4

LN Medium humanoid

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +0, Spot +0

Languages Common, Elven, Goblin

AC 21, touch 11, flat-footed 20

hp 38 (4 HD)

Fort +7, **Ref** +3, **Will** +3

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares)

Melee mwk flail +8 (1d8+3) or

Ranged mwk composite longbow +6 (1d8+3/x3)

Base Atk +4; **Grp** +7

Atk Options Block Arrow, Improved Trip, Shield Wall

Combat Gear 2 *potions of cure light wounds*, *potion of enlarge person*

Abilities Str 16, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 8

Feats Block Arrow[B] [HoB], Combat Expertise[B], Improved Trip, Iron Will, Shield Wall[B] [HoB]

Skills Climb +2, Craft (any one) +6, Intimidate +5, Knowledge (history) +2, Move Silently -1, Ride +5

Possessions combat gear plus masterwork full plate, masterwork flail, heavy steel shield, masterwork composite longbow, quiver with 20 arrows, potion bracer

Tactics: Shield Wall provides the trooper with an additional +2 shield bonus to AC when he is adjacent to an ally using a shield. Block Arrow allows him to deflect one missile attack each round, providing he is aware of the attack and using his shield.

Hobgoblin Sniper

Hobgoblin Sniper CR 5

Male hobgoblin ranger 2/fighter 2

N Medium humanoid

Init +4; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +4, Spot +5

Languages Common, Goblin

AC 18, touch 14, flat-footed 14

hp 31 (4 HD)

Fort +8, **Ref** +7, **Will** +0

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee flail +6 (1d8+2) or

Ranged+1 *composite longbow* +9 (1d8+3/x3) or

Ranged+1 *composite longbow* +7/+7 (1d8+3/x3) with Rapid Shot

Base Atk +4; **Grp** +6

Atk Options favored enemy* +2, Point Blank Shot, Plunging Shot, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot, Ready Shot

Combat Gear 2 *potions of cure light wounds*

Abilities Str 14, Dex 18, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 8

SQ wild empathy +1 (-3 magical beasts)

Feats Point Blank Shot[B], Plunging Shot[HoB], Precise Shot[B], Rapid Shot[B], Ready Shot[HoB], Track[B]

Skills Climb +6, Heal +5, Hide +8, Knowledge (Dungeoneering) +2, Listen +4, Move Silently +10, Ride +5, Spot +5, Survival +5

Possessions combat gear masterwork chain shirt, buckler, flail, +1 *composite longbow* (Strength rating 14), darkweave cloak. Potion bracer with two *potions of cure light wounds*

*Common choices for favored enemy are human, goblinoid, or elf.

Tactics: Plunging Shot allows the sniper to inflict an additional +1d6 points of damage with ranged attacks against opponents that are at least 30 feet below him. Ready Shot allows him to inflict +3d6 damage with a ranged attack against a charging opponent within 15 feet. When the sniper is using his buckler, his AC is 19 (touch 14, flat-footed 15).

Bugbear Bladebreaker

Bladebreakers are bugbear shock troops. They are raised to seek glory in battle, but they are not savages; for a Dhakaan bugbear, rage is a carefully cultivated state of combat frenzy. They understand the importance of tactics in battle and heed the orders of their hobgoblin commanders. Bladebreakers may be male or female.

Bugbear Bladebreaker CR 5

Male bugbear barbarian 1

N Medium humanoid (goblinoid)

Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., scent; Listen +1, Spot +2

Languages Common, Goblin

AC 20, touch 12, flat-footed 17

hp 43 (4 HD)

Fort +7, **Ref** +6, **Will** +3

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee mwk greatsword +12 (2d6+12/19-20)

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +9

Atk Options Cleave, Power Attack, rage 1/day (7 rounds)

Combat Gear *potion of enlarge person*, 2 *potions of cure light wounds*, tanglefoot bag, 2 thunderstones

Abilities Str 26, Dex 16, Con 18, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 6

SQ fast movement

Feats Cleave, Power Attack

Skills Climb +5, Hide +7, Jump +5, Listen +1, Move Silently +6, Ride +4, Spot +2, Survival +1

Possessions combat gear plus masterwork chain shirt, masterwork greatsword, masterwork composite longbow, quiver with 20 arrows, darkweave cloak, potion bracer

When not raging, the bugbear has the following changed statistics:

AC 20, touch 14, flat-footed 19

hp decrease by 12

SV Fort +5, Will +1

Melee mwk greatsword +10 (2d6+9/19-20) or

Ranged mwk composite longbow +7 (1d8+6/x3)

Grp +9

Abilities Str 22, Con 14

Skills Climb +5, Hide +7, Jump +5, Listen +1, Move Silently +6, Ride +4, Spot +2, Survival +1

Goblin Taarka'khash Scout

Mercenaries from the Silent Wolf clans, the taarka'khash can be found serving any Dhakaan leader. As with all the troops in this article, this is an exceptional scout; lower-level taarka'khash can be found in Darguun.

Goblin Taarka'khash Scout CR 6

Male goblin rogue 3/scout 3

N Small humanoid (goblinoid)

Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +10, Spot +10

Languages Common, Elven, Goblin

AC 20, touch 15, flat-footed 16; uncanny dodge

hp 32 (6 HD)

Resist evasion

Fort +5, **Ref** +11, **Will** +3

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee mwk rapier +7 (1d4+1/18-20) or

Ranged +10 mwk composite shortbow (1d4+1/x3) or

Ranged +8/+8 mwk composite shortbow (1d4+1/x3) with Rapid Shot

Base Atk +4; **Grp** +1

Atk Options Point Blank Shot, Rapid Shot, skirmish (+1d6), sneak attack +2d6

Combat Gear *potion of invisibility*, 2 *potions of cure light wounds*, tanglefoot bag, 2 thunderstones

Abilities Str 12, Dex 18, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 6

SQ battle fortitude +1, fast movement, trackless step, trap sense +1, trapfinding

Feats Point Blank Shot, Quick Reconnoiter[CAAdv], Rapid Shot

Skills Balance +5, Climb +3, Disable Device +9, Escape Artist +6, Hide +16, Listen +10, Move Silently +16, Open Lock +12, Ride +8, Spot +10, Search +10, Survival +3, Tumble +12, Use Magic Device +4

Possessions combat gear plus +1 *chain shirt*, masterwork rapier, masterwork composite shortbow, *cloak of resistance* +1, potion bracer, masterwork thieves tools, and either a *circle of sound* or a *ring of protection* +1, depending on which better serves the needs of the mission

Goblin Evoker

The Dhakaan have come to respect the tactical power of wizardry. Most of the clans have only a few wizards, and these characters are assigned only to critical missions. The CR of the character has been increased due to the value of her gear.

Goblin Evoker CR 7

Female goblin evoker 5

N Small humanoid (goblinoid)

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +1, Spot +1

Languages Common, Draconic, Elven, Giant, Goblin, empathic link

AC 13, touch 13, flat-footed 11

hp 19 (5 HD)

Fort +4, **Ref** +3, **Will** +5

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee dagger +1 (1d3-2/19-20) or

Ranged dagger +5 (1d3-2/19-20)

Base Atk +2; **Grp**-4

Combat Gear *wand of dispel magic*, 2 *potion of cure light wounds* (backpack), *potion of invisibility*, *potion of protection from arrows* 10/magic, *potion of cure moderate wounds*

Spells Prepared (CL 5th):

3rd -- *dispel magic*, *fireball* (2, DC 17)

2nd -- *glitterdust* (DC 16), *invisibility*, *scorching ray* (2, +5 ranged touch)

1st -- *enlarge person* (2), *mage armor*, *magic missile* (2)

0 -- *detect magic*, *mage hand*, *message*, *prestidigitation*

Abilities Str 6, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 18, Wis 12, Cha 6

SQ familiar, share spells

Feats Alertness[B] (if familiar is within 5 ft.), Enlarge Spell, Scribe Scroll[B], Sudden Maximize [CArc], and one of the following: Brew Potion[B], Craft Magic Arms and Armor[B], Craft Wand[B], or Sudden Empower[B] [CArc]

Skills Concentration +9, Craft (alchemy) +10, Hide +8, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Knowledge (history) +12, Knowledge (the planes) +12, Move Silently +6, Ride +6, Spellcraft +14

Possessions combat gear plus dagger, darkweave cloak, wizard's spellshard, potion bracer, and either a *circle of sound* or a *ring of protection* +1, depending on which better serves the needs of the mission

Spellbook spells prepared plus 0 -- all except necromancy or enchantment; 1st -- *alarm*, *comprehend languages*, *shocking grasp*; 2nd -- *arcane lock*, *continual flame*, *gust of wind*; 3rd -- *displacement*, *Leomund's tiny hut*

Rat Familiar CR --

N Tiny magical beast

Init +2; **Senses** low-light vision, scent; Listen +1, Spot +1

Languages empathic link

AC 17, touch 14, flat-footed 15

hp 9 (5 HD)

Resist improved evasion

Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +5

Speed 15 ft. (3 squares), climb 15 ft., swim 15 ft.

Melee bite +4 (1d3-4)

Space 2-1/2 ft.; **Reach** 0 ft.

BaseAtk +2; **Grp** -6

Abilities Str 2, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 2

Feats Weapon Finesse

Skills Balance +10, Climb +12, Concentration +8, Hide +14, Listen +1, Move Silently +10, Swim +10, Spot +1

About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the Wizards of the Coast Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the ***Eberron** Campaign Setting* and *Shadows of the Last War*, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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